

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7723

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1746

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 5119

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR SU EG

SUBJECT: PRESS COMMENTARY ON POSTPONEMENT FAHMY VISIT TO MOSCOW

SUMMARY: PROMINENT EGYPTIAN JOURNALISTS ALI AND MUSTAFA AMIN ATTEMPT IN JULY 13 AL-YAWM TO SMOOTH OVER WAVES CAUSED BY POSTPONEMENT FAHMY'S VISIT TO MOSCOW, CLAIMING IT IS MERE ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGE AND HAS NO POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. IN HIS WEEKLY COLUMN IN AKHBAR AL-YAWM JULY 13, ALI AMIN HAS FOLLOWING STORY TO TELL CONCERNING POSTPONEMENT FAHMY VISIT TO MOSCOW SCHEDULED FOR JULY 15TH: FORTY-EIGHT HOURS BEFORE BREZHNEV MESSAGE REQUESTING POSTPONEMENT, GOE AMB TO USSR SENT REPORT "LAUDING GOOD FEELING MOSCOW OFFICIALS AND THEIR WILLINGNESS TO LIVE UP TO ALL AGREEMENTS, AS WELL AS THEIR DESIRE TO REMOVE ALL REASONS FOR SHORTLIVED COOL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES." SOME EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS, ALI GOES ON, BELIEVED MININDUSTRY MUHAMMADAIN SHOULD RETURN IMMEDIATELY TO CAIR FROM MOSCOW UNTIL REASONS FOR BREZHNEV SURPRISE DEMAND BECAME CLEAR. HOWEVER, SADAT ORDERED MUHAMMADAIN TO CONTINUE HIS MISSION, SINCE EGYPT IS KEEN "TO IMPROVE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE FRIENDLY SOVIET UNION AND TO REMOVE ANY POSSIBLE MISUNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES".

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COUNTRIES". ACCORDING TO ALI, FAHMY BELIEVED HE SHOULD POSTPONE

MOSCOW VISIT, SINCE HE MUST GO TO PARIS AND WASHINGTON. MOSCOW, HOWEVER, INSISTED ON JULY 15 DATE, AND GOE AGREEMENT HAD NO SOONER BEEN CONVEYED TO MOSCOW THAN USSR REQUESTED TWO MONTHS POSTPONEMENT.

2. ALI WRITES "IT IS EXPECTED EGYPT WILL RECEIVE FULL EXPLANATION IN NEXT FEW DAYS", AND "INFORMED SOURCES" SEE NO JUSTIFICATION FOR TALKS ABOUT CRISIS IN RELATIONS. ACCORDING TO ALI, EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR IN MOSCOW SUSPECTS POSTPONEMENT WAS DUE TO "SPECIAL REASONS WITHIN SOVIET GOVERNMENT".

3. IN SAME ISSUE AKHBAR AL-YAWN, ALI'S BROTHER, MUSTAFA, RECALLS ALI'S JUNE 15 PREDICTION THAT FAHMY VISIT WOULD BE DELAYED. MUSTAFA ADDS: "WE AGREE THAT MOSCOW SHOULD CHOOSE MORE CONVENIENT TIME FOR DISCUSSION ON CONSOLIDATING RELATIONS. WE ARE ALSO CONCERNED TO LET THE WORLD KNOW THAT IMPROVEMENT OF OUR RELATIONS WITH USG WAS NOT AT EXPENSE OF USSR". "AMERICA WOULD NOT RESPECT US TODAY IF WE ABANDONED OUR FRIENDS IN TIME OF NEED". EGYPT NEVER WAGED HOSTILE PRESS CAMPAIGN AGAINST USSR AND KEPT MOSCOW INFORMED OF ALL STEPS IN GOE USG RELATIONS, HE ADDS.

COMMENT: GOE IS APPARENTLY PUTTING BEST PUBLIC FACE ON WHAT DIPLOMATS HERE INTERPRET AS DELIBERATE SNUB. WHATEVER REASONS FOR CANCELLATION MAY IN FACT BE, EGYPTIAN AND FOREIGN DIPLOMATS TO WHOM WE HAVE TALKED, ASSUME SNUB WAS PREMEDITATED AND DELIBERATE. ALI AMIN'S HINT THAT POSTPONEMENT IS DUE TO PROBLEM IN MOSCOW IS PERHAPS AN INDIRECT ALLUSION TO BREZHNEV'S HEALTH, BUT WE DOUBT THIS ALLUSION WILL BE UNDERSTOOD HERE EXCEPT BY HIGHEST LEVELS GOE..KORMANN

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